DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 628 CS 506 418

AUTHOR Soukup, Paul A.
TITLE Formal and Informal Catholic Church Policies in Regards to Owning Broadcast Properties.
PUB DATE Nov 88
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (74th, New Orleans, LA, November 3-6, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Broadcast Industry; Catholics; *Church Role; Higher Education; Media Research; Ownership; *Radio; *Television
IDENTIFIERS *Catholic Church; *Media Ownership; Religious Broadcasting; Roman Catholic Church

ABSTRACT

Despite a wealth of broadcast properties in the United States and abroad, the Catholic Church has little formal policy towards ownership of such properties. Most of the Church's recent statements on communication treat the theme in a general way and balance a defense of human rights in regard to communication with encouragement of greater use of the media in proclaiming the Gospel. Statistics indirectly demonstrate the favorable Church policy towards ownership: around the world the Catholic Church or Church-organizations (largely missions and mission societies) own 290 radio stations and five television stations. Church ownership of broadcast properties in the United States is mostly at the local level, and includes educational, college, and some commercial stations. In general, policy regarding ownership of broadcast properties seems to be favorable to ownership where opportune, and to leave specific decisions on ownership and management to as local a level as possible. (An appendix listing Catholic college radio stations, and 14 references are attached.) (SR)

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Formal and Informal Catholic Church Policies in Regards to Owning Broadcast Properties[1]

Paul A. Soukup, S. J.
Communication Department
Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, CA 95053

November 5, 1988

[1]Paper delivered at the 74th Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, New Orleans, Louisiana.

CS506478

Abstract

Despite a wealth of broadcast properties in the United States and abroad, the Catholic Church has little formal policy towards ownership. Church documents encourage where other owners prohibit or limit Church access. Other Church ownership seems directed to non-religious purposes—for example, as a part of an educational mission.

The Catholic Church around the world forms a unified ecclesial community with a common faith, a common liturgical expression, a common theological and moral tradition, a common organizational structure, and some recognizably common traditions and expressions. But within this overarching Church exists an incredibly diverse group of people and structures. Because of the commonalities, many people (including many Catholics) assume that the Church has a monolithic approach to many things when in fact it does not. Broadcasting and the ownership of broadcast properties fall into the "does not" categories. Apart from some very general statements, little exists in the form of policy.

When it comes to communication the diversity of the Church shows through even more dramatically. Church broadcast communication occurs through any one (or combination of) the following levels:

- The Vatican
- The Vatican press offices
- Vatican Radio
- Regional conferences of bishops (the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States, for example)
- Local Dioceses (the Diocese of New Orleans, the Diocese of San Francisco, for example)
- Catholic organizations (an overseas mission society, for example)
- A religious order (the Franciscans or the Paulists, for example)
- Catholic colleges and universities (Loyola University of New Orleans, for example)
- individual Catholic entrepreneurs

This list is most likely incomplete, but it does give a sense of the complexity of the broadcasting picture.

This paper presents various aspects of the Catholic Church practices in regards to broadcast properties. The first section reviews the general statements and documents issued by the Church, with particular attention to the

situation in the United States. The second part briefly describes what the Catholic Church does in other parts of the world while the third part describes its activities in the United States. Finally, both parts two and three present some inferences about unstated policies.

1 General Statements

Most of the Catholic Church's recent statements (that is, since the time of the Second Vatican Council) on communication treat the theme in a general way and balance a defense of human rights in regards to communication with an encouragement of the greater use of media in proclaiming the Gospel. In this context *Inter Mirifica*, the Council's statement on communication has this to say about Church ownership of broadcast properties:

> Likewise, decent radio and television programs should be effectively supported, especially those suited to the family. Ample encouragement should be given to Catholic transmissions which invite listeners and viewers to share in the life of the Church and which convey religious truths. Catholic stations should be established where it is opportune. Their transmissions, however, should excel by technical perfection and by effectiveness [11, #14].

This statement—most likely influenced by the general European system of state ownership of broadcast stations—simply urges program development and then recognizes the possibility of the establishment of stations where possible. In this latter desire, it reflects an older tradition of Catholic communication which sought a separate Church-controlled press [12].

This line of thought received some development in the next major Catholic statement about communication and communication policy. In 1971 the Vatican issued a much more detailed document, prepared at the request of the Second Vatican Council. After a theological introduction on the nature of Christian communication, the document examines the possible contributions of the media to the progress of human society, the role of communication in the Church, and the role of communication in the mission of the Church. Ownership of broadcast properties appears as options in the latter two sections.

Noting that communication and public opinion form a necessary part of the life of the Church, the document calls for a greater dialogue within the Church and among its members.

> Since the development of public opinion within the Church is essential, individual Catholics have the right to all the information they need to play their active role in the life of the Church.
>
> In practice this means that communications media must be available for the task. These should not only exist in sufficient number but also reach all the People of God. When necessary, they may even be owned by the Church as long as they truly fulfil their purpose [8, #119].

Though narrowly drawn this statement sets out a general policy encouraging Church ownership of media outlets (print and electronic) for internal Church communication.

A few pages later a similar policy appears in terms of media ownership for the spread of the Gospel.

> In order to make the teaching of Christianity more interesting and effective the media should be used as much as possible. Every effort should be made to use the most appropriate technique and style in fitting a communication to its medium.
>
> The Church can use means of communication that are not under her control but which, under agreed conditions, are offered for her use. Where it is necessary, she may also herself own and administer means of communication. No hard and fast rules can here be laid down; the situation varies from place to place [8, #131-132]

Lest the Church seem impractical, a warning about the "considerable financial resources" for ownership follows this last section.

From the two Vatican documents, an outline of a policy towards ownership emerges. The Church should avail itself of the mass media, using existing state or commercial stations where possible. However, where this use is limited or not possible, the Church can own stations for both internal and external communication needs.

In the United States, the Catholic Bishops' public statements on communication policy have generally not addressed the issue of broadcast ownership. For over one hundred years, though, they have encouraged the ownership and development of a Catholic press [12]. While the American bishops did seek access to their co-religionists through various print media, they did not officially look much to broadcasting. When the bishops do deal with ownership, they tend to acknowledge what already exists, as they do in this 1986 statement:

> Where local churches, religious communities, and individuals within the church have already invested in establishing media libraries and structures (publishing houses, journals, film production facilities, **radio and television studios and stations**, and even satellite links), we urge the whole church to utilize these resources fully through cooperative and equitable ventures [1, page 15]. [Emphasis added.]

The sense here seems less to encourage ownership than to encourage access to what is already owned.

The only other place where ownership as a policy option occurs in the public statements of the Catholic Bishops of the United States is in the context of the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America. This satellite network provides in-house services including teleconferences, some program distribution, electronic mail, and so forth. It is owned by the Church but the network leases time on satellite transponders. In this instance the bishops voted to participate in the ownership of this kind of broadcast property [1, page 15].

In the discussions surrounding the development of CTNA, a study document on church communications explicitly raised the possibility of whether the Church should "acquire radio and/or television broadcast licenses" [3, page 12]. This particular suggestion appears as the seventh item in a 25-item list of options. Informal polls of diocesan communication directors and of directors of Church-related communication organizations showed little support for this option. On a scale of one to 12, with 12 the most supported, the diocesan directors rated ownership a three. Using a different scale, the organization directors showed more support, with a significant but not highly supported ranking [14].

The evidence for the United States suggests that the Catholic Bishops, both as a body and as represented by their communication officers, do not actively support ownership of broadcast properties. If an individual church office or organization wishes to pursue such a course, it could do that on the local level—all the bishops formally ask seems to be the opportunity to have access to the public through such a venture. The documents show that the bishops do fund, though, broadcasting in support of internal church communication, particularly through the CTNA.

2 Catholic Broadcast Ownership Throughout the World

Largely through the entrepreneurial efforts of missionaries and mission societies, different Catholic Church offices and organizations have established broadcast facilities around the world. Some of these ventures began in response to the invitations of the Second Vatican Council; others were long established. This section will indirectly demonstrate the favorable Church policy towards broadcast ownership by simply reciting some statistics.

The Church's biggest interest seems to be in radio, more properly, in low-power radio. Around the world the Church or Church-organizations own over 290 stations.[1] Roughly, this breaks down in this fashion: Africa—five active stations and one in the planning stage; Asia—29 active stations and several in the planning stages; Near and Middle East—two stations; North America—three stations, not including the school stations; Central America—four stations; South America—179 stations, excluding Columbia and parts of Brazil; and Europe—68 stations. The European figure includes Vatican Radio, a multi-channel, multi-lingual operation first set up for the Vatican by Guglielmo Marconi himself.

Television broadcast stations appear less frequently in the listings. The

[1]This figure does not include all the stations in Brasil, Columbia, Italy, Portugal, West Germany, or the United States. UNDA—the Catholic Association of Broadcasters and Allied Communicators—is still trying to compile a complete listing. Brasil has over 130 Church-owned stations; several European countries now allow private ownership of low-power stations and so church groups in Italy, Portugal, and West Germany and now applying for licenses. The United States figures do not include the educational or school-owned stations.

Catholic Church in Venezuela has three stations; in Portugal the Church is in the process of setting up a Catholic TV network. There is one Catholic television station in the Caribbean and one in Africa. Planning for up to 13 television stations is currently going on the Philippines [7].

These numbers eloquently testify to at least some positive attitudes on the part of the Catholic Church toward owning broadcast properties.

3 The United States Situation

Church ownership of broadcast properties in the United States happens mostly at the local level. Such ownership includes educational stations, college stations, and some commercial stations.

3.1 ITFS

The single largest Catholic Church use of broadcast properties falls under the heading of instructional television–a network of Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS) stations. Granted that these might more precisely be termed "narrowcast" properties, the Federal Communications Commission classifies them as over-the-air broadcasting, making use of the microwave frequencies rather than the VHF or UHF bands. Monsignor Michael Dempsey, the director of the Brooklyn Diocese's ITFS system, estimates that the 12 ITFS facilities—which include studios, transmission facilities, and reception facilities—would be valued in the 20*to*30 million range today. "ITFS probably does represent the largest investment the Church has made in the communications area" .

ITFS began in the early 1960's, with the original idea being to segregate a group of frequencies for the educational use of public school districts. The districts which applied for the licenses tended to have from seven to 15 schools, often located in rural areas. Most of these attempts did not succeed, mostly because they lacked the economic and demographic bases to achieve economies of scale. Since 1966 the Catholic school systems in larger cities have become the most successful users of the ITFS system for educational purposes. An association of the individual diocesan offices—the Catholic Television Network (CTN)—represents the affiliated offices. In addition the ITFS network links individual parishes for the purposes of catechism classes

and adult education programs.

> CTN provides a wide range of specialized educational, instructional, cultural and religious services for students, teachers, school administrators, health professionals and para-professionals, hospitalized patients, senior citizens, ethnic groups and other segments, Catholic and non-Catholic, of their communities. These four channel systems typically transmit 150-180 hours of programming weekly [13, page 3].

Presently 12 Catholic dioceses operate ITFS systems. These are located in Boston, Brooklyn, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York City, Orange County (California), Rockville Center (Long Island), San Bernardino (California), the San Francisco Bay area (the Dioceses of Oakland and San Jose, with San Francisco parishes belonging on an individual basis), and Youngstown, Ohio. In addition, Dallas and New Orleans have affiliations with the network of ITFS stations, using their programming but distributing it in alternative ways. Dempsey estimates that this network of educational facilities covers somewhere between one third and one half of the total population of the United States.

The ITFS system connects schools and institutions, providing primarily educational services. However, the system has the capacity to manage other information needs; it can provide, for example, rebroadcast of satellite feeds, electronic mail delivery, and even telephone service. As the technology improves, some dioceses transfer routine communication to the ITFS system, making use of spare bandwidth or off-hours. In Detroit, for example, the Catholic Dioceses use the ITFS electronic mail system to provide routine announcements to the parishes, thus by-passing the more expensive distribution system of the U.S. Post Office. Dempsey estimates that larger dioceses spend almost $1 million per year on mass mailings to parishes (preparation, printing, and mailing); an ITFS-electronic mail system could reduce this cost drastically by eliminating the need for printing and mailing [2].

Although individual dioceses applied for ITFS licenses and built facilities in the middle to late 1960's, the national conference of bishops issued no official church guidelines or policy on the system until the late 1970's. At this time, the Bishops approved the existing projects and explored ways to incorporate the ITFS systems in a larger information distribution system for the Church. In the early 1980's—at a time when the Federal Communications

Commission strongly advocated deregulation—the American Bishops became more involved as a body when they filed a series of comments with the FCC opposing the use of the ITFS band by commercial services. These services sought to create "urban over-the-air 'wireless cable' networks" and further sought to make use of the broadcast spectrum hitherto reserved for non-profit organizations. A sense of the Catholic Church's policy towards ITFS emerges from one comment filed with the FCC. The Church highlighted two broad areas of use: Church-related communication and community-related communication. Under the former heading comes national and regional teleconferencing, data and facsimile transmission of the Church's news service, in-service training for a variety of Catholic social organizations, and internal digitalized communications. The community-relations component includes educational programming, community digital services (linking hospital diagnostic equipment, for example), regional teleconferencing for civic groups, and interconnections for non-profit groups [4].

The pattern from the history and from the various FCC filings shows a slowly developed policy of the Catholic Church in the United States towards ownership of this type of broadcast property. First, individual dioceses decided on the need for educational broadcast services. Then, later, central Church organizations decided that Church should own and operate ITFS facilities as the distribution leg for Church information services. The ITFS system will tie into other distribution systems (satellite services provided by the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America, for example) and forward programming on to localized users. The ITFS system will continue to serve its traditional educational users but will also meet internal communication needs of the Church (specialized national and local teleconferences, electronic mail, and so forth). Finally, some portion of the ITFS system will serve community needs not necessarily tied to religious groups [4,13,5].

3.2 College Stations

Catholic colleges and universities have long included radio stations as a part of their educational mission. Where some of the stations might have featured more religious programming at one time, few of them do today. Most of the time, the stations simply find sponsorship by the educational institution as a part of campus life—an extracurricular activity or a practical exercise for communication students. A quick search for Catholic college radio turned up

75 schools which owned and operated campus stations. (See the appendix for the full list.)

Many of the programs probably resemble the one at my own university, Santa Clara University.

> **KSCU-FM Radio** KSCU-FM is managed and operated solely by Santa Clara students. It is designed to train students in broadcasting skills and to provide the University community with music, news, sports, and public service information [10, page 217].

3.3 Commercial Stations

Catholic dioceses or Catholic organizations have some investment in commercial broadcast properties. The largest that come to mind are WWL (radio and television) in New Orleans, both owned by Loyola University, and WNDU (radio and television) in South Bend, both owned by Notre Dame University. Other Church ventures in commercial television have been less successful: at the moment the Diocese of Tucson is trying to start up a for-profit UHF station in its market (both as an investment and for the purpose of religious broadcasting); several years ago Santa Fe Communications attempted to break into the Los Angeles market with a religious UHF station. Both stations are struggling to compete successfully. Santa Fe Communications is a private Catholic organization, not affiliated with any diocese or religious order. Finally, the Diocese of New Orleans owns and operates WLAE, an educational station.

Radio appears more often in the Church's inventory. Some school owned radio stations that serve a wide market area include WWL, WFUV (operated at Fordham University in the Bronx), and WNDU. In addition the Diocese of Fairbanks operates station KNOM in Nome, Alaska. Other Catholic groups run stations in the Pacific Northwest, in Florida (WBVM in St. Petersburg), and in the Midwest (WMRY in Belleville, Illinois).[2]

Since the stations differ so much in ownership (by dioceses, by private groups, by religious orders of priests, brothers, or sisters), they do not follow any one policy. Each group has decided to pursue broadcasting for its own

[2]This listing is by no means complete; apparently no one associated with Catholic communication work has a complete listing, only a reference to a few friends or acquaintances involved in the same kind of work.

reasons. A very few stations appear strictly as financial investments. More often, the organization owns and operates the station for religious purposes—to evangelize, to teach, to uplift, and so on.

To give a sense, though, of one kind of thinking behind Church ownership, here is the mission statement on radio station WMRY in Belleville, Illinois. The station is part of the Oblate Media and Communication Corporation, an organization of the Oblates of Mary religious community.

> Our commitment is to be leaders in serving the entertainment needs of our audience, the 25 to 49 year-old adult, by becoming the number five station in this demographic group. Financially, we will pay our way, fund our own growth and make an annual contribution to ownership. We seek to be fun to be with, responsive, and trusted, always keeping our listeners' and clients' best interests at heart. WMRY will entertain, inform and even inspire in an environment of positive human values [9].

The distinctive thing about this mission statement is its explicit focus on values and on the "listeners' and clients' best interests." While finance is a criterion for success, the humanistic value seems more important.

Other stations take a clearer religious tone. Some offer strictly religious programming, recitation of prayers, and bible studies. Some use a mixed format.

The independent quality itself of these stations makes it difficult to fit them into an overall "Catholic policy" towards broadcast ownership. To make an effort, though, I would suggest that the stations fit into one of three categories. (1) *Commercial* for-profit stations exist less as a matter of Church policy than as a matter of expedience or investment. (2) *Educational* stations exist to provide educational opportunities for audience members or for station personnel. (3) *Inspirational* stations follow a specific mission to influence the world or to change values or to provide religious messages to a wide audience.

A number of built-in difficulties also plagues Church ownership of broadcast stations. Centralized Church government (the Conference of Bishops or a bishop of a given region) tend to avoid broadcasting in general and ownership in particular because of the large financial commitment necessary. Many judge that the Catholic Church does not have the kind of money needed—or that monies have already been committed to other, worthier, projects.

Other problems include the Church's lack of expertise at running a station and the inability to creatively deal with market competition. Finally, station ownership can lead to a strange conflict between the local owners and the Church's Communication Office. Following general policy statements the Communication Office has lobbied both Congress and FCC to protect the Fairness Doctrine. That office tends to see the issue in terms people's right to communicate, a right outlined in the Vatican document, *Communio et Progressio*. Local Church-run stations often oppose the Fairness Doctrine because it would require their giving time to groups advocating causes with which they disagree on moral grounds [6]. Where the national office defends a principle, the local owners find that that principle can have unpalatable consequences in specific cases.

Church ownership of broadcast properties leads to a variety of positions. Are there policies? In general, yes—the Church should own stations where opportune. In specific cases, the policy seems to leave the decision and the management to as local a level as possible.

Appendix: Catholic College Radio Stations

These Catholic Colleges and Universities have campus radio stations; the listing comes from those including a radio station in the campus life section of Peterson's College Database.

1. **ASSUMPTION COLLEGE, Worcester, MA 01609**
2. **BOSTON COLLEGE, Chestnut Hill, MA 02167**
3. **BRIAR CLIFF COLLEGE, Sioux City, IA 51104**
4. **CABRINI COLLEGE, Radnor, PA 19087**
5. **CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA, Washington, DC 20064**
6. **COLLEGE OF NOTRE DAME OF MARYLAND, Baltimore, MD 21210**
7. **COLLEGE OF SAINT BENEDICT, Saint Joseph, MN 56374**
8. **COLLEGE OF ST. FRANCIS, Joliet, IL 60435**
9. **COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS, Worcester, MA 01610**
10. **CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY, Omaha, NE 68178**
11. **DEPAUL UNIVERSITY, Chicago, IL 60604**
12. **DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY, Pittsburgh, PA 15282**
13. **FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY, Fairfield, CT 06430**
14. **FORDHAM UNIVERSITY, Bronx, NY 10458**
15. **GANNON UNIVERSITY, Erie, PA 16541**
16. **GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, Washington, DC 20057**
17. **GONZAGA UNIVERSITY, Spokane, WA 99258**
18. **HOLY FAMILY COLLEGE, Philadelphia, PA 19114**

19. JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY, University Heights, OH 44118
20. KING'S COLLEGE, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711
21. LA SALLE UNIVERSITY, Philadelphia, PA 19141
22. LE MOYNE COLLEGE, Syracuse, NY 13214
23. LEWIS UNIVERSITY, Romeoville, IL 60441
24. LORAS COLLEGE, Dubuque, IA 52001
25. LOYOLA COLLEGE, Baltimore, MD 21210
26. LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY, Los Angeles, CA 90045
27. LOYOLA UNIVERSITY, NEW ORLEANS, New Orleans, LA 70118
28. LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, Chicago, IL 60611
29. MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY, Milwaukee, WI 53233
30. MARYCREST COLLEGE, Davenport, IA 52804
31. MARYWOOD COLLEGE, Scranton, PA 18509
32. MERCYHURST COLLEGE, Erie, PA 16546
33. MOUNT MARTY COLLEGE, Yankton, SD 57078
34. MOUNT SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE, Emmitsburg, MD 21727
35. OHIO DOMINICAN COLLEGE, Columbus, OH 43219
36. PARKS COLLEGE OF SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY, Cahokia, IL 62206
37. PROVIDENCE COLLEGE, Providence, RI 02918
38. QUINCY COLLEGE, Quincy, IL 62301
39. REGIS COLLEGE, Denver, CO 80221
40. ROCKHURST COLLEGE, Kansas City, MO 64110

41. ROSARY COLLEGE, River Forest, IL 60305

42. SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY, Bridgeport, CT 06606

43. SAINT FRANCIS COLLEGE, Loretto, PA 15940

44. SAINT JOHN'S UNIVERSITY, Collegeville, MN 56321

45. SAINT JOSEPH'S COLLEGE, Rensselaer, IN 47978

46. SAINT JOSEPH'S COLLEGE, Windham, ME 04062

47. SAINT JOSEPH'S UNIVERSITY, Philadelphia, PA 19131

48. SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY, St. Louis, MO 63103

49. SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE, Winona, MN 55987

50. SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA, Moraga, CA 94575

51. SAINT MEINRAD COLLEGE, Saint Meinrad, IN 47577

52. SAINT MICHAEL'S COLLEGE, Winooski, VT 05404

53. SAINT PETER'S COLLEGE, Jersey City, NJ 07306

54. SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE, Latrobe, PA 15650

55. SAINT XAVIER COLLEGE, Chicago, IL 60655

56. SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY, Santa Clara, CA 95053

57. SETON HALL UNIVERSITY, South Orange, NJ 07079

58. SIENA COLLEGE, Loudonville, NY 12211

59. SPRING HILL COLLEGE, Mobile, AL 36608

60. ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY, Jamaica, NY 11439

61. ST. NORBERT COLLEGE, De Pere, WI 54115

62. ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY, Davenport, IA 52803

63. ST. BONAVENTURE UNIVERSITY, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778

64. STONEHILL COLLEGE, North Easton, MA 02357

65. UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME, Notre Dame, IN 46556

66. UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND, Portland, OR 97203

67. UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO, San Francisco, CA 94117

68. UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON, Dayton, OH 45469

69. UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT, Detroit, MI 48221

70. UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON, Scranton, PA 18510

71. UNIVERSITY OF MARY, Bismarck, ND 58504

72. VILLA MARIA COLLEGE OF BUFFALO, Buffalo, NY 14225

73. VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY, Villanova, PA 19085

74. WALSH COLLEGE, Canton, OH 44720

75. XAVIER UNIVERSITY, Cincinnati, OH 45207

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